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SUCCESS STORY

DOUBLE DIPPING:

Finfish farming increases incomes of seaweed growers



LAlajandrino

"we know that fish for export was commanding high prices in Zamboanga City, but we didn't know how to take advantage of the market. Now with GEM Programs help, we are culturing and selling finfish even as we continue to grow seaweeds."

BOL SALIM,
Cluster Leader
Marunggas Alliance of
Seaweed Farmers Association

By assisting former combatants of the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) move beyond subsistence farming, USAID's Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM) Program is helping the former combatants to substantially increase their income, and, simultaneously, is helping to consolidate and strengthen peace in the Sulu archipelago, a string of islands stretching southwestward from Mindanao.

The former combatants are beneficiaries of USAID-GEM's Targeted Commodity Expansion Program (TCEP), a multi-pronged effort aimed at expanding production, marketing, and export of higher value agricultural and fisheries products in Mindanao.

One TCEP activity involves training some 800 former combatants, who had already been helped by USAID to become commercial seaweed growers, to also grow high-value marine finfish (e.g., grouper, snapper, seabass). Under this TCEP scheme, the solar dryers used by these seaweed growers to dry their crop, become the basic infrastructure for the fish cages the former combatants construct to hold the fish they are raising. The solar dryers typically are built on stilts out over the water. By the simple expedient of affixing nets to the stilts supporting the drying platforms, the fish cages are created.

With most finfish commanding prices of about \$5 per kilogram, the market for the finfish grown by these seaweed-growers cum fish-farmers is excellent. Typically, the annual income of the 800 former combatants involved in finfish farming has doubled because of the activity.

To help assure profitability and long-term continuation of the finfish growing enterprise, GEM has helped the fish-farmers to form producers' associations, and then has helped to establish linkages between the finfish producers and regional traders. Three of these associations recently signed a marketing agreement with a key buyer based in Jolo, the capital of the Sulu Province.

"Alhamdulillah, finfish growing is an answer to our prayers for a better life. With the increased income, more people in our community will engage in this lucrative venture, Insha'Allah," says Elol Salim, an MNLF commander who also heads one of the TCEP-created finfish producer associations.